

As a minister within the body of Christ, I am deeply rooted in a tradition that emphasizes unity, ecumenism, and service. For me, this call began unexpectedly, through a simple act of helping a local church with music during the Covid pandemic in 2020. Witnessing the power of community and compassion ignited a desire to serve that continues to shape my ministry at Frist Christian Church of Van Alstyne, Tx. This reflection will delve into the core aspects of our faith and practice: the Christian faith, the nature and work of the church, the representative ministry of Jesus Christ, and the office of ordained ministry. By exploring these themes, I aim to deepen my understanding of what it means to serve within this denomination and how these elements inform our calling to love God and neighbor.

The Christian Faith – What is it?

The Christian faith is not merely an academic exercise but a life-transforming truth with the power to reshape our lives and our world. It is a journey of love, redemption, and transformation, rooted in the conviction that God, through Jesus Christ, has offered humanity a path that leads to salvation and full life. This faith is not just about intellectual assent to a set of denominational doctrines; it is a deeply personal and emotional experience that transforms lives.

As part of the Restoration Movement, the Disciples of Christ have historically sought to restore the church to its New Testament roots, emphasizing unity and simplicity in faith and practice. Our founders, such as Alexander Campbell and Barton W. Stone, believed that the church should be guided solely by the Bible and that denominational labels and creeds often caused unnecessary divisions among believers. For Stone and Campbell, this meant

stripping away centuries of tradition to reveal the dynamic, life-altering faith described in the book of Acts.

In today's world, we are still in need of a restoration movement that rises above denomination division and embraces the simple life-transforming truth of Jesus. More than rules, intellectualism, or rote traditions, this faith is both simple and powerful. It is simple enough that a child can practice it, and it is powerful enough to change a life forever.

Jesus says, “Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” (Matthew 7:24) This is the very essence of our faith: to BELIEVE what Jesus said and to put his words into ACTION. This faith changes our thoughts, hearts, and actions.

For this reason, Evangelist Walter Scott and the early restoration movement focused on five finger discipline: (1) Believe, (2) Repent, (3) Be baptized, (4) Receive forgiveness, (5) and experience God’s Holy Spirit. This simple message of “Jesus said this! Now you should do this!” is the exact message we see the original disciples preach in Acts 2. We still preach this message of belief and action, and it applies to every area of life – justice, mercy, and righteousness. It is a faith for everyone, and everyone is welcome to receive and then carry the message of Jesus.

It is through the church that these practices become realized and the message of Jesus can reach the world.

The Nature and Work of the Church

More than a physical building, the church is a vibrant community of believers who carry the message of Jesus Christ into the world. Rooted in the biblical concept of the church as the body of Christ, with Christ as its head (Ephesians 4:15-16), the church is not confined to walls or structures but exists wherever the message of Jesus is proclaimed and lived out. Throughout history, wherever that message was spoken, people believed and acted on that belief, and a local church was born. This was evident in the early Christian era, as apostles and disciples traveled, preaching the gospel and establishing communities of faith. The church grew organically as people responded to the message of salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ. This active role within the church brings to life God's gift of salvation through his son!

In the Disciples of Christ tradition, this understanding of the church is particularly relevant. Our congregational polity emphasizes the autonomy of local churches, recognizing that each community is a manifestation of the body of Christ, capable of discerning God's will and living out their faith in practical ways.

As active participants, we are carriers of Jesus' message, exhibiting our simple & powerful faith in every aspect of life. We are to be agents of transformation in our communities, advocating for justice, serving the marginalized, and spreading love and hope. As followers of Christ, this is our nature and work! Therefore, when you see a member of the Church you are seeing the Love of Jesus and are to expect the message of Jesus from this person, in word and deed.

Wherever we are, we carry the light of the gospel, and our actions reflect the love and teachings of Jesus. By recognizing that the church is not just a building but a living, breathing community of believers, we fulfill our mission to spread the message of Jesus and bring hope to a world in need.

What is the best model to carry out this mission?

The Representative Ministry of Jesus Christ

While there are many models for church growth that appear yearly in the latest books - seeker-sensitive, small group, effective church, denominationally directed church planting - the best model is following the person and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ's ministry is the ultimate model for Christian living. His teachings, miracles, sacrifice, and resurrection demonstrate God's love and redemption plan for humanity. Jesus' servant leadership, complete with apron as seen in John 13, sets a clear standard for Christian ministers to humbly care for others. This leadership is not about power or prestige but about serving others in humility and love. Jesus served all, whether serving meals at a homeless shelter, visiting someone in prison, or sitting with someone who is lonely.

He is our model and guiding light for compassion, forgiveness, and service. By following His example, we are called to be agents of transformation in our communities, presenting the gospel, advocating for the marginalized, and working towards the kingdom of God.

The Office of Ordained Ministry

In the body of Christ, while every believer is called to carry the message and live out the model of Jesus, there are special giftings and callings that require careful preparation and discernment. The process of ordination involves a thorough examination of a candidate's faith, character, and gifts for ministry, as outlined in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:1-7). This process is rooted in the biblical principle of recognizing God's calling on an individual's life, as seen in the example of Paul and Barnabas.

In Acts 13:2-4, the Holy Spirit calls Barnabas and Saul (Paul) to a specific work, and the church responds by fasting, praying, and laying hands on them to demonstrate their commissioning. This act signifies the church's recognition of God's calling and empowerment for ministry. Similarly, ordained ministers today are called to serve the church in various capacities, including proclaiming the Word through preaching, teaching, administering the sacraments, providing pastoral care, and equipping the saints for works of service.

Historically, the Disciples of Christ have valued the role of ordained ministers while also recognizing the priesthood of all believers. This balance ensures that while ordained ministers provide leadership and guidance, all members of the church are empowered to participate in the ministry of the church. The ordination of a minister does not elevate them to a special class of citizen in the Kingdom of God; rather, it is a recognition of the gifting and calling God has for the individual.

Ordained ministers carry a significant responsibility to uphold sound theology, safeguard the faith, and guide their congregations in biblical truth. They are entrusted with the duty of

teaching, preaching, and pastoral care, thus preserving the spiritual health of the community. This responsibility is not taken lightly, as ordained ministers are called to serve with humility, integrity, and a deep commitment to their calling. In our modern world, the ordained leaders must lead the congregation to be the Church which Jesus commissions for us.

In the Disciples of Christ tradition, ordination is not a means of conferring special power but a public affirmation of God's prior calling and equipping of an individual for service in the body of Christ. As such, ordained ministers are expected to carry out their roles with confidence, knowing that they are acting under God's direction and with the support of their community.

Conclusion

"Contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people" (Jude 3).

There is a faith that was entrusted to God's holy people. Do we have this faith? If so what are we doing with it? Jude thought it was worth contending for, do we?

We are not simply preserving an ancient creed or denominational difference, but actively embodying a living, transformative faith.

As Disciples of Christ, rooted in the restoration of the message of Christ, we are compelled to live out this simple yet powerful faith: believing in Jesus' words and putting them into action. May we, with unwavering commitment and a spirit of unity, contend for this faith, becoming beacons of hope, justice, love and redemption in a world that so desperately

needs it. May our lives be a testament to the transformative power of the gospel, inspiring others to embrace the call to believe and act, carrying the message of Jesus to the ends of the earth.